



ANNIE DINWOODIE-DOLAN, MA, LPC

# *Moving Forward After a Loss*



2009 started off with a bang. Within the first month I managed to plan every one of life's major events into one year. My boyfriend (now husband) and I found out we were pregnant, we got engaged, planned a wedding, got married, and bought a house. In the mean time, I was finishing my Masters degree in Marriage and Family Counseling. I used to joke about how I was going to be packing every major life event one could go through into the next few months, oblivious to the tragedy that was coming.

We married on May 9th, moved into our new home on August 1st and on August 29th, our beautiful daughter Rorie was born. We brought her home and everything in life seemed perfect. Everything fell into place so nicely. However, the perfect picture was soon shattered when less than a month afterwards our daughter passed away on Sept 27th, from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

Death was the one thing that wasn't planned for that year, especially not the death of our daughter. I've come to learn that there are few things worse in life than losing someone you love suddenly, losing your child being the worst. There is no preparation, no advance notice. It wasn't like planning our wedding, or preparing for her birth. It wasn't like studying for an exam or writing a paper. There is no manual that tells you what to do or that your beautiful, healthy, strong baby might just slip away from you in the night. There's nothing! But out of all of the nothingness, there is something. There is sadness, pain, heartache, tears, love, kindness, compassion, hope, and life. Throughout and above all there is love.

I have begun to see life as a school. We are all students and teachers in our own rights. It seems that the hardest lessons we learn in life come from loss. Not only are they the hardest, but they must be learned for reasons that will remain unknown until the day that our own time comes to leave this world. Not all of these life lessons have remained a secret.

Rorie taught me more about life and love in the 29 days she was here than I had ever known in the 31 years that I have been. She also taught me about faith, pure and simple; a faith that isn't clouded by religion. I now know that this life isn't it for us, there is something else out there, a place where we'll all be together again. Life continues. We need to slow down and enjoy our time here and the people around us. I've also learned that love never dies. Our bodies may die but our spirits do not. The love that we have for those we have lost will always be there.

Losing Rorie has taught me about compassion and kindness. I have never known nor could have imagined that people could be so kind, strangers so compassionate. I'm



beyond grateful to those who have showed this to me. I now know how much a little bit of kindness may mean to someone else. We all suffer through things in life; compassion from others eases the blow. I hope that I can repay those who have been so wonderful to me throughout all of this by helping someone else in need.

Moving forward after any significant loss is never easy. Its often physically painful. It can leave you feeling empty inside. Many people feel as though they are betraying the person who passed by returning to life. For myself, I had to make a conscious decision not to “move on” but to “move forward” with my life. I felt getting back to “life” would in some way honor my daughter. Life would never be the “normal” that I knew before her. She had forever changed me and I would have to find a new “normal.”

I have always known that I wanted to help others, sometimes specific groups of people, sometimes general. I’ve learned that there is a community of people out there larger than there ought to be, hidden away like a taboo subject. I’ve met so many moms and dads, like myself, that suffer silently, because the pain is at times just too much to deal with. Others try to reach out, but do not know what to do or say. I hope that some day I can help some of those moms and dads. Not only because I know their pain, but because there is a need. My loss has led me be give back and help other parents like myself. I’m currently in the process of becoming Certified in Grief Counseling.

Looking back and through it all I’m grateful. Of course I would have liked for the outcome of that year to be very different than it was, to never know this type of pain. But I’m grateful for the time she was physically here with us. Rorie will always play a very important role in our family and in many ways has helped us move forward. In her brief time here she taught my husband and I just how amazing it is to be parents. We wanted that again. We knew we were meant to have children. Six months after Rorie passed we

became pregnant with our son Matthew. He has brought so much joy and light back into our lives. I know she picked him especially for us.

For those who recently suffered a loss, I would like to share a few things to be aware of as you go through your journey with grief and strive to move forward.

- \*There are lots of decisions to make. Many are very painful. Be kind on yourself and take your time in making them. Try not to make major life changing decisions within the first 6 months if you can help it.
- No two people grieve the same way. Each loss is unique to the person just as the relationship to the loved one was unique. Be patient with those around you and let them know that you need them to be patient with you.
- Grief is a roller coaster, you have good days and you have bad days. Enjoy the good ones and try not to feel guilty about it. Your passed loved one would want to find happiness again.
- Surround yourself with people who can support you. Limit your contact with those who cannot. If you find it difficult finding support among your family and friends, reach out to a support group in your area or online for those going through a similar type of loss.
- Do something to honor your loved one. Whether that be planting a tree or running a charity race in their name, you will feel better knowing that you are keeping their memory alive and honoring the love you have for them.
- You can let the loss hold you back from your life or you can face it head on and move forward, at some point you will have to choose. If you feel overwhelmed by your loss please seek professional help.

Annie Dinwoodie-Dolan is a Licensed Professional Counselor.

If you would like help in processing your loss she can be reached at 630-655-0404 or by

email at [Annie@lifeworkcounseling.net](mailto:Annie@lifeworkcounseling.net)